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ABSTRACT

As educational institutions prepare to meet the challenges of the new millennium, it becomes more apparent that computer-competent students should be graduated to meet the needs of the advances in technology in the workplace. One technology that is readily available is presentation software, which allows the student to generate slides, overheads, screenshows, handouts, and speaker notes all from a single file. In the public speaking course, students can be overwhelmed with all the required elements for an effective speech. PowerPoint by Microsoft is user friendly presentation software, which may be purchased alone or as a part of Microsoft Office, and is available for both Macintosh or Windows. (CR)

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Powerful Presentations with PowerPoint

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OVERVIEW:

As educational institutions prepare to meet the challenges of the new millennium, it becomes more apparent that institutions should graduate computer-competent students to meet the needs of advances in technology in the workplace(Coates & Jarratt, 1993). Consequently, educators should incorporate technology teaching and learning. Course activities, projects, and curriculum content can be designed and facilitated to incorporate technology so that students are given the opportunity to develop technical skills and to explore in more detail the specific course content in a new manner.(Monoghan, 1993).

One technology that is readily available is presentation software. Presentation software allows the student to generate slides, overheads, screenshows, handouts, and speaker notes all from a single file. By interactingwith this type of technology, students play a more active role in structuring their own learning situations. What should be attractive to all educators is that presentation software is applicable in all disciplines. For our purposes however, the discussion and sample overheads will center on the application of presentation software in a basic public speaking course.

RATIONALE:

In the public speaking course, students can be overwhelmed with all of the required elements for an effective speech: identifiable main points, sufficient and credible support, logical thoughts, clear structure, and an appropriate introduction and conclusion to name a few. When the assignment requires visual support, many students wait until the last minute to determine what type of visual support to include. Often students feel inhibited by their lack of knowledge regarding design. Some perceive that they are not artistically talented; therefore, they refrain from using illustrations; others do not want to take the time to design bold and clear letters, thus lettering is too small to be seen clearly or very sloppy. Too often the end result is that visuals are poorly or inadequately designed. Instead of complementing the content of a presentation, the visuals detract from its effectiveness. This need not be the case. Presentation software provides students with choices about the design of visuals: layout of information, type of special effects, background design, and choice of clip art illustrations. One such package that is user friendly, accessible to students and faculty, and allows for an array of options is PowerPoint by Microsoft.

PRESENTATION SOFTWARE:

Several different types of presentation software exist: Adobe Persuasion, Gold Disk Astound,

DeltaGraph Pro as well as Microsoft PowerPoint. All of these software packages are fairly compatible(McClelland,1994). One advantage of PowerPoint is that it is part of Microsoft Office; three programs in one package and is available for both Mac and Windows. For institutions who are interested in purchasing power, Microsoft Office is an excellent package. PowerPoint also may be purchased individually.

DESCRIPTION OF POWERPOINT:

PowerPoint allows for a wide range of abilities. For those students who have bare minimum computer skills, PowerPoint has an option called: Pick a Look Wizard. This option automatically selects background and print layout so that the student need only input the data that will appear on each visual. Others who would like to have more control over design options may choose from twenty-one different templates--black/white and color. In addition to choosing templates, students may also pick among 12 different layouts. Layouts include options of clip art, bulleted items, flow charts, and graphs. Special effects of shadowing, highlighting, and 3-d design are available. Design is not the only feature of PowerPoint. One potential troublespot is the timing of visuals. PowerPoint has a rehearsal feature that allows feedback on presentation timing. For those students who need assistance with organization, PowerPoint includes several different outline templates. The templates suggest what type of information should be included; a student need only substitute his/her information for the suggestions made by PowerPoint. These outline template applications are best suited for a persuasive topic.

APPLICATION OF POWERPOINT

Students in an basic public speaking course were first instructed on how to use PowerPoint's basic applications in conjunction with an informative speech assignment. This took two class periods in the computer lab; the first was for instruction and demonstration; the second was for students to experience on their own how to manipulate PowerPoint.

There were two major requirements to the visual portion of the informative assignment. First, students

had to type their outline in PowerPoint's outline template which is called: outline view. My reason for this is quite simple; I wanted students to see their ideas in "black and white" versus on a scribbled, scrunched up, splattered remnant of paper. By seeing their thoughts in print, my hope was that students would have more of a chance to critically evaluate the content of their speeches. Secondly, students had to design two overheads and one sheet of speaker notes from their outline. Prior to the students making a definite choice on the appearance of their materials, I required that students show me a preliminary draft of each overhead and of their speaker notes. This gave me a further opportunity to interact with students about their speeches.

A few days prior to the first round of speeches, I instructed students on the techniques of using overheads and gave them time to practice. I stressed repeatedly that design is only half of the job; the other half is to incorporate your overheads effectively in your presentation. Students seemed eager to practice.

OUTCOMES

There were several reasons as to why I incorporated the use of PowerPoint in my assignment. First, I wanted students to be active learners, to have an opportunity to think more clearly about what they were attempting to do. Secondly, my hope was that students would perceive the computer as a valuable resource and would be motivated to explore its applications in other areas. Thirdly, my goal was for students to incorporate visual support that looked more "professional". Although this assignment did not conform to the basic criteria of a multimedia presentation, I aspired to give students a small glimpse of what is possible with the aid of presentation software.

As a whole, students' overheads were designed more effectively and supported main ideas more clearly. By taking the time to consider layout options, background, font size, number of sentences, and types of illustrations by either use of free hand drawing tools or the clip art option, students became more involved with their presentations. Certainly from the perspective of audience members, these speeches were more interesting to listen to thereby creating a greater attention span for the audience which suggested to the speaker that his/her presentation was more effective.

Problems that did arise such as fonts not large enough or background too dark or too distracting provided for some excellent discussions. More than what could be learned from a chapter, the experience of being able to manipulate options by use of the computer empowered many students to consider more fully the ramifications of effective and ineffective visuals.

So far the discussion has centered on the design of overheads. Another interesting effect was the use of speaker notes. Typically, many students choose to use a manuscript style of speaking. Unfortunately, they are not trained to do so and the delivery of the speech suffers dramatically. With PowerPoint, speaker notes must be condensed; one can not write out the entire speech word for word. Therefore students had to make some decisions regarding the content of their speaker notes. Since PowerPoint helps students organize their speaker notes and requires that students be more familiar with their information, the overall delivery style tended to be extemporaneous and energized--a definite plus.

CONCLUSION

For the instructor who desires that students perceive the correlation of assignments to the "real world" the inclusion of presentation software is invaluable. With PowerPoint, it is just as easy to design graphs, organizational charts, and spreadsheets as well as a list of 3-5 ideas. As noted, PowerPoint is configured to meet the needs of students with or without computer experience. Once students work with PowerPoint and discover not only its ease but also the professional results, it is my hope that many students will view the computer as more than just a machine to type papers.

Computer technology can be utilized to provide a skill-based learning experience and cover the traditional conceptual, information-based learning objectives(Baily & Cotlar, 1994). Little tradeoff is needed in terms of course teaching time to incorporate computer technology. Skills learned by students with computer technology should enhance their marketability. The bottom line is that computer technology is not an end in itself but rather a vehicle that can compliment traditional styles of education.

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